Surprised to find itself rainbow

Jane Routh reviews 'Plymbridge' by Anthony Wilson (Worple Press, 2026)

THE FRIDAY POEM
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Bogs

Poem ending with a line by Tonnus Oosterhoff

Round the back of the Dining Hall,
a redbrick block of them, open
to the elements, unchanged
since my father.

A better bet were the parents'.
Absorbent paper, and because you had trekked
to get there, a modicum
of privacy.

Or, much later, the girls'.
No one was allowed near these.
Plus you had to know one.

Nobody escaped from that time.

'Bogs' is from *Plymbridge* by Anthony Wilson (Worple Press, 2026) — big thanks Worple for letting us reproduce it here.

Is it a pamphlet? Is it a book? And does it matter which *Plymbridge* is? I'll work ou what I think about that that as I read it, but for starters I check with a pamphlet e

who insists that her pamphlets have no more than 20 poems. *Plymbridge* has 24, that makes it a book. Another pamphlet editor tells me 24 is definitely a pamphle look at the price: does £10 make it a book? (That's 42p a poem.)

Some years back, it was simpler: you'd could have said books have spines and pamphlets have staples, and staples limit the number of sheets that can be folde together. Contemporary printing has changed that: out with the staples and in w glue – so now, for example, all of Verve's pamphlets have spines (and those I hav my shelves range from 12 to 31 poems). Yet still that pamphlets can offer a good way for younge the notion that published poets can use the par theme.

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I start by mentioning these thoughts because I f reading *Plymbridge* – how to place it? – are my interfering with my reading? (Yes they are.)



Plymbridge "is named after the hidden wooded valley on the northern edge of Plymouth close to where Anthony Wilson now lives. Rich with wildlife, it is also m by its industrial past" is how the cover blurb begins. The book opens with a long part poem about the rivers Exe and Plym, both of which have wonderful evocatic water, from some "pea-green lagoon-sludge" in the Exe to the Pym's

> [...] reverse-eddies
> crawl up-
>
> stream, what was
> mirror
>
> surprised to find itself
> rainbow.

(It's a shame, though, when there is plenty of blank space to play with, that the v first page has been set with a terrible page turnover, cutting off "a beach of brow

froth / at rest" from its stanza's final line, "on a beach of grey shale.")

This rivers poem – and, likely, the cover image of an empty nest tangled in bare v branches – are all that we have of Plymbridge itself: perhaps for Antony Wilson, Plymbridge is the place to look back from, a place where memories resurface for book. Schooldays certainly do – from 'Fresh Air's "drum solo in Los Endos, / so lo miss the bell / at the start of prep" to the effective compressions of 'Time in a Sch House':

> Riotous choirs, punishment dawns.
> Eventually, trunks, large cars.
> And Squire said have a nice life.

There's also a poem titled 'Bogs' (goodness, I'd forgotten about school bogs) and about a launderette. I remember reading and re-reading this poem, 'In the Launc with Adam Zagajewski', when I first came across it in a magazine. The narrator tal book by Polish poet Zagajewski to the launderette and, among chance encounte

> [...] I gave a reading
> of your elegies to the empty drums,
> your parents clearer than childhood.

The 'you' of the poem 'Class' is another poet to whom Anthony Wilson gives thar After reading *Careful What You Wish For,* "Cover-to-cover and back-to-back twic I do, once before sleeping / then between zeds", his thanks are for being made "r by it in a wonderfully convoluted train of thought in which he borrows the tumultuously long sentences, which the (un-named) 'you' flourishes so casually himself. (Goodness, that type of long sentence structure is obviously infectious.) Anthony Wilson doesn't name this poet ... but does offer the clue of "Carcanet, 2(you don't recognise the book's title.

Similarly, the poem 'The Singer' leaves you to work out it's a poem of thanks to Andrew Rumsey (now Bishop of St.Albans).

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Between their lines, many poems carry a sense of looking – and of appreciation. T probably true of the 'found' poems, too. 'Biographical Details' is a 'found' bio pul from Faber's *Poetry Introduction 7,* which had me wondering for a while which of poets "Now lives in Southampton", when I know which one

> Has completed research
> onto the impact of acid rain
>
> on Cumbrian tarns

and – since that researcher doesn't live in Southampton – the penny dropped ab how the poem was built from its 'found' fragments in that book.

Adam Zagajewski appears again (named) in 'Adam Zagajewski Visits Lvov', a poe found from *Should We Visit Sacred Places?* translated by Clare Cavanagh. He ope hotel curtains to the garden

> where one of my nineteenth century cousins,
> a lawyer and a poet, caught such a bad cold
> that he died soon after of pneumonia and ever since
> has been reduced to an elegant shadow
> in an oil portrait.

In a lighter vein, even body parts get their appreciation in 'My Knees at Sixty-Twc

> How present you suddenly are
> after years of ignoring you
> by doing nothing
> more than getting up each day
> and going in to work.

This looking-back may well be preferable to looking ahead: "I am frightened of

bungalows" is nicely understated. "Please / do not send me there!"

I find myself referring to *Plymbridge* as a book, rather than a pamphlet. It has the of a book; it has pages I can move between, poems I can re-read – but just when getting into the swing of it, here I am left sitting on the tarmac, finding it's all ove too short. I don't recall ever having said that of a book before.

Addendum: In view of recent headlines about accusations of rape on the C4 programme *Love at First Sight* (where the TV company matches people up and th "marry" at first sight and then see how they get on), I must also mention Anthony Wilson's short poem 'At first Sight' – yes, he anticipated the problems and has al written the poem: "it's clear she can't love him, can't bear / even to look at him." second of his two stanzas hastens to explain. He's "appalled at myself /... a show found by accident, / after my thriller had come to its grisly, inevitable end". (Now there's a line to ponder.)

Jane Routh has published five poetry collections with smith|doorstop. Her first, Circumnavigation, won the Poetry Business Competition and was shortlisted for t Forward Prize for best first collection; Teach Yourself Mapmaking received a Poet Book Society Recommendation. She has taken first prize in the Academi Cardiff International Poetry Competition (with the title poem of The Gift of Boats) and in Strokestown International Poetry Competition. She contributes reviews and non- to several publications.

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Sharon Black 26 Jun

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Really enjoyed this sensitive review by Jan Routh. I think 24 is a pamphlet. :-)

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